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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (04/28): "WHAT IF BUSH LEAVES
TAKING THE PROMISE, VISION AND MAP WITH HIM?"

Main Stories:

The three dailies open with coverage of the meeting between Palestinian President Abbas and Egyptian President Mubarak in Sharm Al-Sheikh on April 27. Al-Ayyam quotes Abbas saying, "we asked Bush to work on a halt to settlement activities," and runs a Reuters in-depth piece entitled, "Abbas is pessimistic about the possibility for peace." Al-Quds highlights Abbas' statement that, "any agreement we reach with the Israelis will be based on the borders of 1967." Related coverage in the dailies also highlights the travel of Palestinian political party representatives to Cairo on April 28 to discuss a possible truce with Israel. However, Al Quds reports that Nabil Amr, Palestinian ambassador to Egypt, stated that, "Fatah will not send delegations to Cairo" and added that President Abbas has asked him to follow up on Egyptian truce efforts." The papers report that Abbas showed support during his Egypt visit for Egyptian efforts regarding a truce with Israel in Gaza. Meanwhile, "Hamass accuses Israel of delaying any possible truce by imposing impossible conditions," according to Al-Quds. The front page of Al-Quds rounds out reporting on a truce and factions with a quote by jailed Fatah leader Marwan Al-Barghouthi announcing that, "we are conducting talks inside the jails to reinstate unity and return to the prisoner's document as the primary reference for resolving [unity]."

Positive coverage appears on the front pages of the dailies regarding the visit of Palestinian Prime Minister Fayyad to Jenin on April 27. The dailies report that Fayyad expressed optimism about the security situation in Jenin. Fayyad said in a press conference

in Jenin that Israel has approved the establishment of an industrial zone near the border with Israel which will create thousands of jobs. Al-Quds quotes Fayyad insisting that, "We are determined to protect our national project and to establish an independent state." Photos of Fayyad smiling and talking to school girls in Jenin appear on the front pages of Al-Ayyam and Al-Hayat Al-Jadida.

Citing the pro-Hamas Palestine Now website, Al-Quds reports that the "Hamas government" is expanding its ranks. The report notes that an expanded government awaits a show of confidence from former Hamas Prime Minister Haniyah so that it can begin performing its duties.

Progress on Turkish mediation efforts between Israel and Syria attracts front page coverage in the dailies. Al-Quds reports that the Israeli ambassador to Turkey said that negotiations will begin on different levels between Israel and Syria. Related reports in the dailies also highlight that Israeli Defense Minister Barak accused Israeli Premier Olmert of giving away the Golan Heights.

The front page of Al-Ayyam reports that the U.S. Congress "issued a decision" that indicates "American support for Israel as the homeland of the Jewish people." According to Ma'an News Agency, Hamas criticized the decision as "dangerous."

WAFA news agency reports that French President Nicolas Sarkozy declared his intent to use the French Presidency of the European Union as a vehicle to work towards improvement of the lives of the Palestinian people. The declaration was made during an interview with a Tunisian daily newspaper on April 26. President Sarkozy explained that peace will require recognition of the Palestinians' right to an independent, developed and viable state living in peace and security alongside Israel.

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Weekend Stories:

Sunday: 24/4/2008

The front pages highlighted comments made by Palestinian President Abbas on April 26, about reaching an agreement with Israel. Abbas stated that, "a very difficult crisis will unfold if Bush's term in office ends without an [peace] agreement." Abbas added, "we will have to study [what should be] the next step." Al-Quds reported that Abbas stated that, "we will not sign any agreement with Israel that will not satisfy our people and meet their legitimate needs." According to Al Hayat Al Jadida's lead story, Secretary Rice will visit Ramallah on May 3 and another summit will be held with President Bush next month in Sharm Al-Sheikh.

"What has been said in meetings and negotiations contradicts the reality on the ground," PLO Executive committee member Yasser Abed Rabbo commented on Al Ayyam's front page. Related coverage on Al Quds' front page quoted Palestinian President Abbas's senior advisor Nabil Sha'ath stating that, "American policy is based on making the situation explode." He added that Secretary Rice is adopting the policy of, "creative chaos in the region." Sha'ath continued that he believed that, "Tony Blair has had no effective role up until now. He is a very busy man who has not achieved anything, in my opinion." Sha'ath comments were made during an interview at his Cairo office with the German news agency DPA.

The front page of Al-Hayat Al-Jadida carried an AFP story entitled, "McCain says Obama is Hamas' candidate." According to the article, McCain commented that, "I think it's very clear who Hamas wants to be the next president of the United States."

Saturday: 26/4/2008

The dailies were pessimistic in their coverage of Palestinian President Abbas' recent visit to Washington. Al-Quds led with, "Abbas looked angry and expressed pessimism regarding reaching any agreement." Al-Quds headlined an Abbas quote in bolded print: "We have not achieved any progress yet, and settlements are the greatest obstacle to the path of peace." The front pages of the three

dailies also highlighted comments by Abbas spokesman Nabil Abu Rudayna who told AFP that, "President Abbas will not accept any peace agreement with Israel that fails to meet the demands of the Palestinian people." Abu Rudayna "warned" that the current chance for peace could slip away. Citing an AFP story, the front pages of the three dailies reported that the United States denied reports that it gave "the green light to Israel to expand settlements." The U.S. clarification was made in response to comments made by Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert that appeared in a Washington Post article that President Bush gave a letter to Olmert's predecessor Ariel Sharon that "allowed" Israel to expand West Bank settlements.

BLOCK QUOTES:

¶1. Al-Ayyam carries an op-ed by veteran columnist Jawad Al-Bashiti entitled, "What if Bush leaves and takes with him the promise and vision and the map?" (4/28): "...President Bush did not show President Abbas anything during their latest meeting at the White House that gives Abbas optimism about the possibilities for peace. Time is short, and getting shorter, therefore, President Bush warned

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that he will be leaving the White House, taking with him the 'promise and the vision, the map' as Clinton did before with his 'ideas and thoughts'. Something similar to the meeting between former Palestinian President Arafat and Clinton and Barak in Camp David happened at the meeting between Abbas and Bush. What if Bush does leave the White House and leaves Palestinians and Israelis trapped in the 'net of the Annapolis negotiations'... if all Palestinian compromises are not enough to give Palestinians a solution in the coming months? [Then it will be] necessary to follow Abbas [counsel] that Palestinians should study what their next step should be."

¶2. Veteran columnist Talal Okal opines in Al Ayyam under that title, "mixing papers in preparation for big changes" (4/28): "While President Abbas was travelling to Washington to follow on the visit of the King of Jordan to the U.S.... [a] message ... was passed by the Turkish Prime Minister that Israel is ready to return the Golan Heights to Syria in exchange for peace... we can conclude that... the Israeli message to Syria had been coordinated with American policy... And we can see that the American State department is racing against time to prepare ... to revive hope in [the] regional peace process..."

WALLES